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Marina-Aids

NEED FOR WOMEN TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM AIDS, SAYS MARINA

From Salmy Hashim

(Amending the word "contacted" in 3rd para to "contracted".)

WASHINGTON, Oct 26 (Bernama) -- Malaysian AIDS Council President Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said it was important to empower women to protect themselves from AIDS when the environment is disempowering.

Globally, the incidences of AIDS among men and women were about equal, she said, but in Malaysia the number was disproportionate with 90 per cent for men and 10 per cent for women.

She expressed concern over the rise in the number of women who contracted AIDS from their husbands and they might not be aware of it until they became pregnant and tested positive.

"Women are invisible" when it comes to AIDS, she said at a talk hosted by the Malaysian American Society.

Marina is currently travelling in the United States until the end of November to talk about the AIDS epidemic in Asia under a Fulbright scholarship.

She conceded the difficulty of getting cooperation from religious authorities in Malaysia to help fight the AIDS epidemic because of the stigma attached to the disease mainly brought about by drug abuse and multiple sex partners - "we're hammered for helping the immoral."

However, a trip to Uganda along with eight Malaysian muftis had opened their eyes to the role an imam could play in talking about AIDS and prevention, she noted.

In Kelantan and Terengganu, where the incidence of HIV is high, "we're doing our work quietly and at the grassroots level, but it is not easy" because of the restrictive religious laws imposed by PAS, which tended to make women less open, she said.

-- BERNAMA

SH AZZ AO